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Mark E. Eberle

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Introduction

The earliest baseball experiences of major league players and other prominent individuals are often treated superficially in biographies and other historical accounts. In addition, these historical summaries frequently suffer from poor documentation, especially for events that occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In some instances, these deficiencies could be considered of little consequence to the featured story of the person's later accomplishments. In others, the shortcomings have led to questionable conclusions, such as the presumption that Dwight Eisenhower must have lied about being paid to play summer baseball prior to his entry into the US Military Academy at West Point so he could participate in collegiate athletics.¹ As newspapers and documents become increasingly available in digital formats, it becomes correspondingly easier to write well-documented summaries of the early history of baseball, including insights into the experiences of players before they joined major or minor league teams. This, in turn, provides a richer texture to their stories and the history of the game.

Such is the case for Carl Mays, a successful submarine (underhand) pitcher. He adopted this style of pitching while in the minor leagues in 1913 after watching "Iron Man" Joe McGinnity pitch for the Tacoma Tigers of the Northwestern League (Class B).² Both Mays and McGinnity were immigrants to what is now the state of Oklahoma, although they did not meet while they lived there.*

Mays' career in the major leagues from 1915 through 1929 included stints with the Boston Red Sox (4+ years), New York Yankees (4+ years), Cincinnati Reds (5 years), and New York Giants (1 year). During this time, he pitched in the World Series for the Red Sox in 1916 and 1918 and the Yankees in 1921 and 1922. Mays had a major league win-loss record of 207-126 (.622), plus 31 saves, and an earned run average (ERA) of 2.92. He was also a fair hitter, compiling a career batting average of .268. As a major league pitcher, Mays hit 89 batters, a relatively high number, yet he was plunked only four times when he batted, even though retaliation by opposing pitchers was certainly part of the game.³

In perhaps baseball's saddest tragedy, one of the 89 batters hit by Mays remains the focus of his professional baseball legacy. On August 16, 1920, a pitch thrown by Mays hit Cleveland Indians shortstop Ray Chapman in the head. Chapman died at the hospital the following morning, the only major league player to die from an injury received during a game. Other authors have described this tragedy and its aftermath, as well as other aspects

* Born in Illinois in 1871, Joe McGinnity moved to Krebs and McAlester, Oklahoma in 1889, where he worked in coalmines and later in an iron foundry. After his death in 1929, he was buried in McAlester next to his wife. McGinnity was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1946 (Burke et al. 1999; Doxsie 2018).

of Mays' major league career, in more detail than is possible here.⁴ What is missing from the story of Carl Mays is a fuller account of his early experiences in baseball, when he was a dominant (overhand) pitcher for amateur and semiprofessional town teams in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Utah before he began his three-year ascent through the minor leagues toward a major league career as one of the era's best pitchers.⁵

Oklahoma

Carl William Mays was born in Kentucky on November 12, 1891, but his family soon moved to the Missouri Ozarks near Mansfield. When Carl was 12 years old, his father, a Methodist minister, passed away. About two years later, his mother, Louisa Callie Mays, moved the family to a farm near Kingfisher, Oklahoma, where they would be near relatives. It was in Oklahoma that Carl's baseball career began. Mays credited his cousin, John Long, with introducing him to the sport. Long had a baseball, and Mays recalled it was the first one he ever held. The two boys played in nearby pastures on Sundays, when they had no chores. However, Louisa was not told, because she would have objected to Carl breaking the Sabbath in this manner.⁶

Baseball teams were organized in Kingfisher and nearby towns while Mays lived there. In 1908, Kingfisher was a charter member of the New State League, which was soon reorganized as the Oklahoma State League. Neither was affiliated with minor league baseball. The league structure simply allowed the teams to schedule games on a regular basis. During this period, professional and semiprofessional teams supported by rural towns had trouble remaining financially solvent, and clubs in the 1908 Oklahoma State League were no exception. All but one of the original members dropped out of the league before the season concluded, beginning in mid-May with the team in Hennessey.⁷ In their stead, less costly town teams of local amateur players often were organized and played independently. For example, although there is little mention of black baseball teams in newspapers around Kingfisher, a "colored team" from Dover traveled 9 miles south and "trimmed the Kingfisher aggregation of ball players" in August 1908.⁸ It is unknown if Mays attended any of these games, most of which were played on Sundays. The following year, however, the 17-year-old Mays was pitching for the Kingfisher town team.

Newspapers in Kingfisher provided little coverage of their baseball team's competition with nearby towns in 1909. Among the events scheduled as part of Kingfisher's Fourth of July celebration (held on Monday, July 5) was a baseball game between the local "picked nine" and the team representing the Alton Wholesale Grocery Company (Alton Goods) from Enid. The ball game "seemed to interest more people than any other one event," mostly races of various sorts. Kingfisher won, 2-0, but little additional information was provided. No players' names were mentioned. After this, Kingfisher played on Sunday afternoons. They won in Hennessey on July 11 by a score of either 9-3 or 8-3. The following two weekends, they lost in Cashion, 3-1, and defeated Cashion at home, 12-2. A game against El Reno on August 1 was stopped by rain during the fifth inning, with Kingfisher leading 9-2. Of the four completed games, Mays pitched for Kingfisher in at least two of their victories—at Hennessey and in the second game with Cashion. A local newspaper praised his pitching performance against Cashion.⁹

Mays pitched gilt-edged ball. Only in the third [inning] did they look dangerous when a [base on balls], an error and a hit gave [Cashion] their only scores. At the beginning of the seventh Mays got restless and decided to play the remaining three innings himself. This very erratic young man struck out the last nine men to face him in one, two, three order.¹⁰

During these early years of baseball, town teams composed of local players sometimes hired a good pitcher from elsewhere. This is what took Mays to Hennessey, about 18 miles north of Kingfisher. Apparently, his pitching performance against Hennessey on July 11 made an impression on the losers. In mid-August, Hennessey's baseball team held a meeting and decided to hire Mays as their new pitcher. His pay was reportedly \$25 for a month (equivalent to \$697 in 2018), plus room and board. Hennessey newspapers occasionally spelled his name as Mayes, which is the name of a county in Oklahoma. One Hennessey newspaper listed him as George Mayes, as did the *Kingfisher Daily Midget* on July 26. This was the same day the *Midget* reported at length on the hearing in the case of a "gray headed" man named George Mayes accused of starving his nine-month-old child after his wife passed away. He later surrendered care of the child to his sister.¹¹

Through the end of August, Carl Mays pitched in three Sunday afternoon games for Hennessey against Douglas, Drummond, and the Alton Wholesale Grocery Company of Enid. He won all three games, striking out 12, 7, and 11 batters, respectively. After his first game against Douglas, a Hennessey newspaper boasted, "Mays proved good and has signed a contract with the Sluggers for the balance of the season, which means from now on, it will be all to win and none to lose with Hennessey."¹²

These games were a prelude to a baseball tournament held in Enid during the week of the local fair in early September. It was for amateur teams only, but the top three teams were to receive prizes of \$200, \$100, and \$50, respectively, which were later reduced to \$200, \$75, and \$25 (equivalent to \$5,577, \$2,091, and \$697 in 2018).¹³ Enid was not represented at the tournament because the town supported a successful minor league team from 1908 to 1910—the Railroaders—who finished first among eight teams in the Western Association (Class C) in 1909.¹⁴

Hennessey won its first game in the tournament, 3–0. "Mays astonished Enid fans by striking out thirteen men and pitching a 'no hit' game." In fact, it was nearly a perfect game. Mays issued no walks, but in the eighth inning, one player reached base on an error—Mays threw a "trifle high" to first base after fielding a slow ground ball. In their second game, Hennessey scored 10 runs in the first inning and coasted to a 16–7 victory. Mays was again the winning pitcher. Yet, for some reason, which Hennessey newspapers did not explain, Mays did not pitch for the Sluggers in the third and final game against Medford, who won, 4–0. As a result, Medford claimed the purse for first place in the tournament, while Hennessey took second.¹⁵ Perhaps Mays had left Enid or he was otherwise unable to pitch, but earlier in the tournament, a team filed a protest against Medford, accusing them of using a "professional player on a supposedly amateur team."¹⁶ Tournament officials rejected the protest, but perhaps Mays did not pitch for Hennessey in the final game against Medford out of concern his presence as a hired player would jeopardize

Hennessey's chance to claim any prize money. Nonetheless, the information available gives Mays a record of at least 7–0 for Kingfisher and Hennessey, and possibly 8–1, if he pitched for Kingfisher in the victory over Alton Goods and the loss to Cashion.

In 1910, there is a gap in the known baseball history of Carl Mays. The information Mays provided to sports reporter Bob McGarigle through extensive interviews late in his life indicated that he played for Kingfisher and Hennessey when he was 16, which would have been the summer of 1908. Newspaper accounts for these events show it was actually 1909. Mays stated that he left Kingfisher for Mulvane, Kansas that winter and played there the following summer, closing the season in Protection, Kansas and Price, Utah. However, as will be explained in the next section, the events he described in Kansas and Utah actually occurred in 1911. The sequence of events related by Mays to McGarigle was correct, but the years and some of the details were not.¹⁷ This is understandable, given that Mays was recalling experiences that occurred six decades earlier.*

Thus, the actual timeline leaves us with a gap for 1910, between the time Mays pitched in Oklahoma and his trip to Kansas and Utah. A Hennessey newspaper reported in the spring of 1910 that, "Carl Mayes, Hennessey's last year's twirler, it is said, will serve up the benders to the Hennessey aggregation" in a game with Kingfisher on Sunday, March 27. However, no game summary was found. In addition, newspaper box scores did not include Mays in a game between Hennessey and Kingfisher on July 4, in which Kingfisher had a "team picked up among our home boys." Nor was Mays mentioned that year in other games for these two towns or for Mulvane.¹⁸

In the summer of 1910, newspapers in Kingfisher, principally the *Kingfisher Times*, published results for a Sunday School Base Ball League organized that year. The league consisted of three teams representing the local Christian, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. The Baptists did not sponsor a team. The season was scheduled to run from May to September, and games were only played on weekdays, never on Sundays, a fact that would presumably please Louisa Mays. An ice cream social was even held to raise money for uniforms. No mention of the players' ages was found, but given that only a couple of games were reported for a "picked nine" from Kingfisher against teams from other towns, it is possible the Sunday School League provided an opportunity for teenagers (and perhaps older players) to enjoy a regular schedule of games. Dwight Eisenhower participated in just such a league in Abilene midway through his education at West Point. The names of the players in the Kingfisher league were not mentioned, except a pitcher for the Christian Church named Hall, who threw a no-hitter at the end of June, the only shutout among the 12 games played to that point.¹⁹ Perhaps Mays also played in the Sunday School League. Or perhaps he played elsewhere, though he mentioned only the five towns documented in this summary. Perhaps he did not play at all. At this point, all we can do is jump ahead to 1911, when Mays found opportunities to earn a living while playing on teams in Kansas that, like the Sunday school league, did not schedule games on Sundays.

* Bob McGarigle's book about Carl Mays was, in large part, Mays' autobiography, published in 1972, a year after Mays passed away on April 4, 1971.

Kansas and Utah

In 1910, Mulvane, Kansas sponsored an independent, amateur town team, decked out in new gray uniforms with blue belts and “Mulvane” scripted across the front of their jerseys. The team posted a record of 17–5–1. Two of the losses were to the Cherokee Indian barnstorming team from Oklahoma, who traveled with a grandstand, a canvas fence, and a set of acetylene lamps for games played after dark. At the end of the season, “old man Thompson and his nine sons” defeated the Mulvane second nine. Four of the Thompsons played on Mulvane’s first nine, including pitcher Lawrence Thompson and catcher Ernest Thompson. In addition, Ike Thompson managed the team. On September 8, the *Mulvane News* published a photo of the town team and praised their character. “Six of the ten players do not use tobacco in any form. None are cigarette fiends, and none are boozers. Why should we Mulvane folks not be proud of the bunch?”²⁰ It sounded like the sort of team that might meet with the approval of Louisa Mays if her son intended to play baseball.

During the summer of 1911, the Mulvane town team decided to join the amateur Southern Kansas League. The teams scheduled most of their games on Saturdays, which likely would have also pleased Louisa. In addition to Mulvane, three other towns were members of the league: Cheney, Clearwater, and Conway Springs (all four towns are near Wichita).²¹ The Mulvane roster at the beginning of the season was composed mostly of local players from the 1910 team, including the four Thompson brothers and two players named Reynolds. In addition, there were a few new players, including Carl Mays and Jesse Meyers. The team was referred to as a strictly amateur club. “No player in the league will be paid a cent for his services, putting all towns on an equal footing.”²² It seems odd that Mays would move north from Oklahoma to play amateur baseball. However, Mays recalled he was given a job in Mulvane prior to the season, and it is possible his employer allowed him to play on Saturdays.²³ Strictly speaking, he would not be “paid a cent for his services” on the baseball diamond under this arrangement.

The 1911 season began on May 6. Mays was the starting pitcher in five of Mulvane’s league games from May 13 through July 4. He won all five starts, as well as a relief appearance for Lawrence Thompson in a game that went 11 innings on a hot summer day. The contest Mays won on May 27 in Cheney, about 40 miles from Mulvane, was played in a rainstorm because neither team wanted to be responsible for calling a short game. The roads were so muddy that the Mulvane players and fans did not drive home until Sunday, and even then, their cars were frequently stuck in the mud.²⁴ Such was the nature of small town baseball in the days of early automobiles.

Mays primarily worked with local catcher Clyde Smith. However, his catcher on Independence Day was a brother of Joshua Swindell of Rose Hill, Kansas (about 9 miles northeast of Mulvane).²⁵ Josh Swindell, during his only stint in the major leagues, pitched 17¹/₃ innings (parts of four games) in 1911 for the Cleveland Naps (now the Cleveland Indians) during a late-season call-up from the minor leagues.²⁶

In addition to the strong pitching by Mays, in which he struck out at least 10 opposing batters in each of the four starts for which records exist, Mays contributed with the bat.

In the game on July 4, rival Clearwater took an early lead against Mays.* “The record appeared on the score board four to nothing in the fourth inning when Mays went to bat. He picked out one to suit him and sent it under the right field fence, and was safe at home before the ball was relayed in. That started things, and [a fusillade] of two base hits followed, the locals scoring six times in the two innings.” In an earlier game against Cheney, he had not been as fortunate. In the first inning, “Mays knocked a beautiful drive over right field that would have been a homer but for the fast fielding and a perfect peg, Mays going out on home plate.”²⁷

The league schedule ran through the beginning of September, but the final game Mays pitched for Mulvane was his victory on July 4 (he was the shortstop on July 8). The reason Mays left the team was not reported in local newspapers. The *Mulvane News* simply stated that he “left town quite unexpectedly.”²⁸ He was probably lured away by the offer of more money and the opportunity to play more games for another club. There also might have been hard feelings by some in Mulvane against the player from out of town, because Mays was at the center of a minor controversy in the game on June 10, which became known as the “flat bat” game. The reputation of the team trumpeted by the *Mulvane News* at the end of the 1910 season had been tainted.

Conway Springs officially protested the game, accusing Mulvane of using a flat bat, but apparently, only one batter did so. As recounted in the *Mulvane News* that week, “Meyers, who played center field, almost broke up the game in the third by knocking a clean home run with one man on. Conway entered a protest, claiming a flat bat had been used. This was a proven mistake, though one of our boys did use a shaved bat a couple of times, but not after the kick was made in the third inning.” The admission that “one of our boys did use a shaved bat” was a reference to Carl Mays. He recalled decades later that he hit a homerun landing in a haystack with the bat, though the only homerun mentioned in the local newspaper was the one by Jesse Meyers. Mays also claimed he was told to use the bat by the team’s manager. Mulvane defeated Conway Springs 11–4, so use of the bat by Mays early in the game likely had no bearing on the outcome.²⁹

Nevertheless, the league president upheld the protest, and the game was replayed in mid-August, after Mays had left the team. Mulvane won again, so the only changes were to the game statistics, including one less win for Mays (five wins instead of six). After their reclaimed victory, Mulvane put out a defensive statement explaining their view of the incident. “Mays, a floating pitcher, then playing with Mulvane, did use a shaved bat in the third inning and made a hit. He had been ordered by the Mulvane management not to use this bat.” Curiously, the statement did not explain why Mulvane allowed a flat bat on the field in the first place. However, the account published in the *Mulvane News* shortly after the June 10 game had offered a different explanation. Use of the lightly shaved bat “was a return for the bad bat Conway [Springs] worked on us at the previous game. A limber

* Just as a Hennessey newspaper misspelled Carl Mays as Mayes, the name of a county in Oklahoma, a Clearwater newspaper misspelled his name as Maize, a nearby town in Kansas. The Cheney newspaper simply misspelled his name as Mayse.

handled bat that did fearful execution until the umpire ruled it out.” Responding to Mulvane’s later account of the incident that indicted Mays, “A Rooter” wrote in a Wichita newspaper, “The only unfair thing is for Mulvane to openly accuse Mays of using a flat bat, as it was the league pitching and batting of Mays that won nearly every game that Mulvane has won this year.”³⁰ Players and fans alike took town team baseball seriously, and the “Rooter” had a valid point about the importance of Mays to the team.

With Mays no longer on the team, Mulvane struggled to hold onto first place. In their final three games, they lost the first two contests to Clearwater, placing them in a tie for the pennant. In preparation for the final game, it was reported that, “The cows which have been pastured on the outfield of the Clearwater diamond will be moved back a hundred yards to allow the [Clearwater] pill pasters to get the Mulvane players on the run.” However, Mulvane managed to win the final game, 8–6.³¹

After leaving Mulvane in July, Mays pitched briefly for the town team in Protection, Kansas (about 130 miles west of Mulvane). Protection was a member of the independent Clark–Comanche County Base Ball League, which was organized after a four-team tournament in Protection during early June. The other teams represented Ashland, Coldwater, and Englewood. However, Englewood dropped out when the first half of the season concluded at the end of July, and Protection withdrew at the beginning of August. Games were scheduled for Tuesdays and Fridays—a pair of teams would alternate home games each week. This would allow Mays to pitch each week, rather than every other week, as in Mulvane. The rosters initially featured local talent, but outside players were soon being hired to bolster the teams, and some players departed for teams that offered more money. Mays joined Protection in mid-July and worked with a local catcher named Myers, one of three players on the team with that name.³²

Mays probably pitched in three games for Protection (newspapers in the league towns provided limited game summaries). He earned his first victory on a rainy day, striking out 15 batters in a 1–0 contest against Coldwater and pitcher Pete Langley. The two hurlers squared off in another pitchers’ duel on July 28. This time, Mays lost, 1–0. He gave up only three hits and struck out eight, but he twice hit the Coldwater third baseman, Taylor (the only hit batsman in the game). After being hit by a pitch in the eighth inning, Taylor scored the game’s only run on a triple by the next batter. Mays’ battery mate, Myers, had the only hit for Protection, a ninth inning double that came to naught. In addition to these two games, the name of the winning pitcher for Protection in a home game with Ashland was not mentioned, but it was probably Mays, who apparently alternated games with a pitcher named Carter. Carter lost the away game in Ashland that week.³³ If true, this would give Mays a record of 2–1 in Protection.

With the Clark–Comanche County League folding in August, the 19-year-old Mays, in the company of Jesse Meyers, hopped a westbound freight train in search of other opportunities to play professional baseball. Their initial goal was to play winter ball in California, but they only made it as far as Price, Utah, about 100 miles southeast of Salt Lake City. It was here that Mays said the local sheriff interrupted their hobo’s journey.

Instead of confining them to jail for trespassing, the roving base ballists played for the local town team against their nearby rivals—community service, of a sort.³⁴

Mays did not disappoint the fans in Price. His catcher was Milton Miller, a resident of Price, who also served as the team's captain. A player named Myers, perhaps Jesse, was mentioned in local newspapers as playing right field and third base for Price in 1911. Mays remembered Meyers as a utility player who "could hit pretty well." As in Oklahoma, Mays was again playing on Sundays, a fact he probably withheld from his mother. He earned his first victory on August 27 over Kenilworth, 2–1, surrendering only two hits and an unearned run. The following Sunday afternoon, he notched another complete game victory against Helper, 12–6, striking out 12 batters, but giving up seven hits to go with five errors by his teammates. Mays followed that effort on Monday afternoon (Labor Day) with a no-hitter in a 10–0 victory over Mohrland, striking out another 16 batters. A newspaper in Price was understandably delighted with their new pitcher. "That Mays was invincible, is proven by these facts beyond a question, and goes to prove the truth of his claim that he needs to work almost every day."³⁵

The following weekend, in the second game between Price and Kenilworth, Mays added to his perfect record in Utah with an 8–2 victory. Both of Kenilworth's runs scored on a throwing error. Mays struck out 20 batters and gave up only three hits, despite suffering from an injury to one of his hands before the game. "Mays, star pitcher of the Price champion ball team, was showing a badly 'chawed' finger Sunday. Mays tried to pull a bear cub out of a tree, the cub resented the familiarity, and Mays tied up his finger." A week later, Mays pitched a one-hitter, with 18 strikeouts. He also scored three of Price's runs in the 11–0 victory against an all-star team composed of players from Helper, Castle Gate, and other nearby towns. In addition to these intercity games, the battery of Mays and Miller bolstered the local "scrubs" as they defeated the rest of Price's first nine, 8–6, in a scrimmage at Powell Park. Mays missed a chance to pitch against a Boston Bloomer Girls barnstorming team when they failed to arrive in Price to play a game scheduled for early October.³⁶

After compiling records of 7–1 in Kansas and 5–0 in Utah, Mays remained in Utah through the winter of 1911–1912. Plans to organize the Price baseball team for the 1912 season began in February, with Mays and Miller penciled in as the battery. The first game was scheduled for March 31, against Helper, but those plans fell through. The season finally began on April 14 with an exhibition game against the Helena (Montana) Senators of the Union Association (Class D minor league), who had been holding spring training in Provo, Utah. Price guaranteed Helena \$125 to play them (equivalent to \$3,245 in 2018), so admission to the game was increased to 50¢. Unfortunately for the 319 fans in attendance, Helena shut out Price 17–0. Mays struck out nine batters in the first three innings, but a sore finger made him ineffective the remainder of the game.³⁷

That was the last game Mays pitched in Price, but not his last against minor league clubs in the Northwest. Later that month, a Price newspaper reported that Mays and Miller were traveling west "for Ogden, Helena and other points. It is understood by their friends that they have been given an opportunity to try-out with one of the teams of the

Union league.”* No mention was made in the newspaper of Meyers traveling with them, but Mays recalled that he did. The players ended their journey in Boise with the Western Tri-State League (Class D), a four-team league encompassing parts of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. In early May, Miller sent a postcard to a friend in Price, informing him that he and “Mays, former members of the Price baseball team, have signed up for the season with the crack Boise team. Miller states that Mays ‘has it on’ the other pitchers on the team and there is no doubt of his having a good record at the end of the season.”³⁸

In June, Miller and his wife returned to Price, where he resumed management of the Resort pool hall and rejoined the Price baseball team. However, his prediction about Mays was correct. Playing for the Boise Irrigators, Mays pitched 280 innings and compiled a record of 22–9 (.710), with an ERA of 2.08.³⁹ His rapid rise through the minor leagues toward a successful 15-year career in the major leagues had begun.

Frustratingly meager newspaper reports in September 1912 offer the possibility that Mays played in Kansas once more on his trip home for the offseason, but this is by no means certain. His minor league season with Boise ended on September 2. Nine days later, a player named Mays (no first name given) pitched for the town team in Mulvane against the Wichita White Sox. Both teams started the season in the amateur Southern Kansas League, but at the end of June, the White Sox became an independent barnstorming team. Mulvane’s amateur roster included no pitcher named Mays, yet the prohibition against using professional players would not apply to the September exhibition game, in which the White Sox defeated Mulvane, 6–1. “Mays pitched good ball but weakened in the sixth [inning], allowing three runs.” The *Mulvane News* also blamed errors. “Mays, who pitched for Mulvane, was too fast for his team mates, and a number of bad bobbles resulted.” Other details of his performance certainly fit what would be expected from Carl Mays. He struck out 18 White Sox and scored Mulvane’s only run.⁴⁰ Perhaps he stopped in Mulvane to visit friends while he traveled from Boise to Mansfield, or possibly on his way to visit family and friends in Kingfisher before continuing on to Missouri. If true, it would be noteworthy that he was welcomed back by the team involved in the flat bat game the previous year, including three of the Thompson brothers and the two Reynolds.

In 1913, Mays skipped Class C when he was added to the roster of the Portland (Oregon) Colts of the Class B Northwestern League in 1913. However, he injured his arm and could not throw the ball overhand. He remained on the team because he could still hit. It was after seeing “Iron Man” Joe McGinnity successfully pitch underhand for the Tacoma Tigers that Mays resurrected his pitching career. As he grew comfortable with the new throwing motion, his record suffered, dropping to 10–15, but his ERA was a respectable 2.45. In 1914, Mays moved up to the Providence (Rhode Island) Grays of the Class AA International League, skipping Class A. Having mastered the underhand delivery and playing for a better team, his record rebounded to 24–8. The following year, the Boston Red Sox brought Mays to the major leagues to stay, along with fellow pitcher Babe Ruth.⁴¹

* In 1912, the Union Association included teams in Ogden and Salt Lake City, Utah, in addition to Helena and three other towns in Montana.

Post Script: Final Thoughts about Carl Mays

One of the most striking differences among the places Carl Mays played baseball is the contrast between the small, rural communities where he began playing on town teams and the large cities where he played in the major leagues—Boston, New York, and Cincinnati. During the early 1900s, town team baseball was widespread in rural areas, despite the challenges. Workweeks of six days with long hours, objections to playing on Sundays, and the costs in both time and money to travel between towns were all challenges rural communities overcame to compete with nearby towns on the baseball diamond.⁴²

For instance, to play a game in 1909, Carl Mays, “the [Hennessey] Sluggers, and about a dozen good rooting fans, took the Sunday morning passenger [train about 12 miles] to Waukomis where carriages were awaiting them and drove across the country [about 10 miles] to the little city of Drummond.”⁴³ Travel on early roads was also a challenge, as shown by the mud-plagued caravan of automobiles from Mulvane in 1911. Yet rural town teams regularly played each other, and games could be major events in these communities.⁴⁴ Consider that 319 people paid to watch the town team in Price play a low-level minor league team from Helena, Montana. While some of these spectators almost certainly came from the surrounding area, the attendance at that game, in which the home team was trounced 17–0, represented about 30% of Price’s population at the time.

None of the rural towns in which Mays played on amateur or semipro teams was large (Table 1), but it was the environment in which he was raised. Thus, it is not surprising that while he played for Boston and New York, Mays built offseason retreats near Mansfield, where he spent his early childhood. As with the places where he played town team baseball, Mansfield was a small community of only 757 people in 1920. After Mays earned success in the major leagues, he was heralded in the local newspaper as “a Mansfield boy,” although he never played on a local team.* His mother and some of his siblings had returned to Mansfield, so he was also close to his family during the offseason.⁴⁵

Table 1.—Populations from the 1910 federal census for towns in which Carl Mays played town team baseball in 1909–1911.

Town	Population
Kingfisher, Oklahoma	2,538
Hennessey, Oklahoma	1,665
Mulvane, Kansas	1,084
Protection, Kansas	390
Price, Utah	1,021

In 1917, Mays designed and decorated a new home on the family farm about seven miles south of Mansfield along Bryant Creek. A fire of unknown origin destroyed the house and contents in March 1919, while he was at spring training in Florida with the Boston Red

* Mansfield would also gain notoriety as the home of author Laura Ingalls Wilder. It is where she wrote her *Little House on the Prairie* series of books.

Sox. That autumn, Mays had a “log bungalow” built close to the bridge near the town of Manes on the Gasconade River about 20 miles northeast of Mansfield. The Mansfield newspaper referred to the cabin as the Mays Resort or Camp Mays, but in recognition of his trade to the New York Yankees in 1919, the name Yankee Lodge was added to the lexicon. During the summer of 1920, while the Yankees were in St. Louis for a series with the Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles), they were treated to a trout dinner, featuring fish that Mays and his Mansfield friends caught in the Gasconade River at the lodge. All through the tragedy of Chapman’s death in August 1920 and the other stresses of his major league career, Mays continued to return to his small town roots, staying at the lodge during the winters. Sometimes, Yankees catcher (and former Red Sox catcher) Wally Schang joined Mays at the lodge for an extended stay during the winter.* Yet, for Mays, it was not only about escaping to the country. He supported the local community. In 1920, Mansfield decided to field a town team—the Mansfield Grays—and Mays supplied the uniforms. The following year, Mays arranged for the Grays to receive a “special make catcher’s mitt” as a promotional donation from a New York sporting goods company. He also served as a referee at a local boys’ high school basketball game during the offseason. While Mays was away during the summer, groups of young men and women (and chaperones) spent weekends camping, fishing, and swimming at the lodge.⁴⁶

Mays acknowledged that he did not make friends easily. Off the field, he did not drink alcohol and carouse with his major league teammates. On the field, he played with an intensity comparable to that associated with Ty Cobb, whose spikes left Mays with a long scar on his calf. Cobb once threw his bat toward Mays after he continued to pitch Cobb inside and forced him to drop to the dirt. Never friends, the two players came to an understanding about how each played the game with great intensity in their respective roles on the field. Mays also walked away from the Boston Red Sox late in the 1919 season, fed up with a recent World Series team that was trading away players, including Babe Ruth, and could no longer play competitive baseball. When Mays walked out, seeking a fresh start with another team, it precipitated a crisis for league president Ban Johnson and the club owners. It was a challenge to the reserve clause that prevented players from becoming free agents. Johnson suspended Mays and ordered that he was to remain with Boston throughout the suspension. Boston ignored Johnson’s directive and traded Mays to the Yankees. Legal challenges followed, but Mays remained a Yankee for four more years. Despite all this turmoil, Mays did have many friends, and he supported the community in his offseason home. He also mentored boys learning to play baseball. These sorts of relationships were evident throughout his playing career and his retirement.⁴⁷

It is possible the general enmity felt toward Mays by many players and others associated with major league baseball silenced support for his election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. However, two events are usually mentioned as likely reasons he has not been enshrined at Cooperstown. One is his role in the death of Ray Chapman. It was ruled an accident, and shortly after learning of Chapman’s death, Mays described it as “the

* Schang was born in upstate New York, but as his playing days were ending, he moved to Dixon, Missouri, about 80 miles northeast of Mansfield. He was buried in the Dixon Cemetery.

most regrettable incident of my career, and I would give anything if I could undo what has happened.” However, his reputation for pitching inside and his unpopularity led many to blame him for Chapman’s death. The other event is an allegation that Mays intentionally pitched poorly in a loss suffered by the New York Yankees during the 1921 World Series won by the New York Giants (now the San Francisco Giants). Yet no evidence substantiated these allegations, and there were no legal actions or sanctions taken in the matter by the baseball commissioner, Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Thus, the absence of Carl Mays from the National Baseball Hall of Fame is puzzling in light of his career statistics, which show him to be one of the best pitchers of his time.⁴⁸

Neither is Mays a member of the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame, representing the state that was his family home during his early years playing for town teams—where his baseball legacy began. However, another of his family’s early home states acknowledged Mays when he was elected to the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in 2009.⁴⁹ Perhaps he will someday receive his due—long overdue—from the other halls in recognition of a noteworthy baseball career that began with amateur and semipro town teams in rural Oklahoma, Kansas, and Utah.

Acknowledgements

I accessed newspapers online through Newspapers.com and the Oklahoma Historical Society (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/>). I viewed other newspapers on microfilm in the archives at the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka and the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City. The image of Carl Mays on the cover is from the Library of Congress, Harris & Ewing Collection, *Call Number*: LC-H261-5635-A (Prints & Photographs Division), *Reproduction Number*: LC-DIG-hec-06336 (digital file from original glass negative), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hec/item/hec2008004443/> (accessed 11 February 2018). I estimated dollar equivalents with the formula available online at <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/community/teaching-aids/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-1800> (accessed 28 October 2018).

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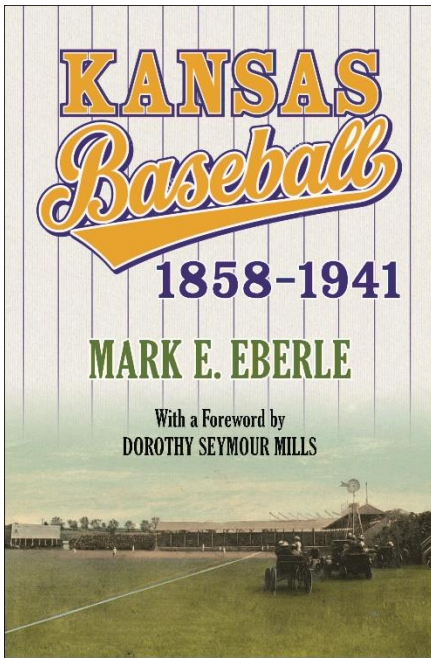
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<i>Dover</i> (OK) <i>News</i>	<i>Price</i> (UT) <i>News-Advocate</i>
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You can learn more about the early history of baseball as played by local teams in Kansas (and adjacent states) in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of nine towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.